

June 27, 2002

ORIGINAL



Mr. Michael K. Powell, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445-12<sup>th</sup> Street S. W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: WC Docket Number 02-150

Dear Commissioner Powell:

In my position as President of the Area Development Partnership in Hattiesburg, I communicate frequently with economic development agencies and councils throughout the state, as well as large companies that either conduct business, or are looking to do business in Mississippi.

As a result, I am familiar with the interLATA long distance petition BellSouth recently filed with the Federal Communications Commissions (FCC), as well as, the impact their ability to offer long distance service in Mississippi means to the economy of this state. It is the latter point that I wish to address.

Most of the benefits of the recent long distance price reductions in Mississippi have gone to very large users of this service. Small businesses, which provide most of the employment in the state and offer the largest opportunity for growth in the future, have seen little in the way of cost savings and have had to deal with the confusion of multiple providers. The average low-volume user has been left by the wayside.

The business community of Mississippi believes that once BellSouth enters the long distance business other companies will lower their long distance rates for all consumers in an effort to compete. As the cost of doing business in Mississippi decreases (through lower charges for local and long distance service), the opportunity to attract businesses to relocate into our state increases. I believe allowing BellSouth to provide a competitive service will not only lower rates, but also spur economic development.

Finally, I believe it is important to encourage a business to grow; especially one that already has a strong local presence. BellSouth is one of the largest taxpayers in Mississippi, as well as one of our largest employers, and the company is an outstanding corporate citizen in every community it serves. BellSouth's active and retired employees are involved in numerous community endeavors and contribute thousands of volunteer hours each year to projects throughout the state.

It is my hope that the FCC will approve BellSouth's petition for long distance. Not only will their entry into the market bring savings to businesses in Mississippi but also it will provide an economic incentive needed by our state.

Sincerely,

Gray Swoope  
President

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cc: Marlene H. Dortch, FCC Secretary  
Dorothy Attwood, Wireline Competition Bureau Chief  
Susan Pie, Wireline Competition Bureau-Room 5-C224